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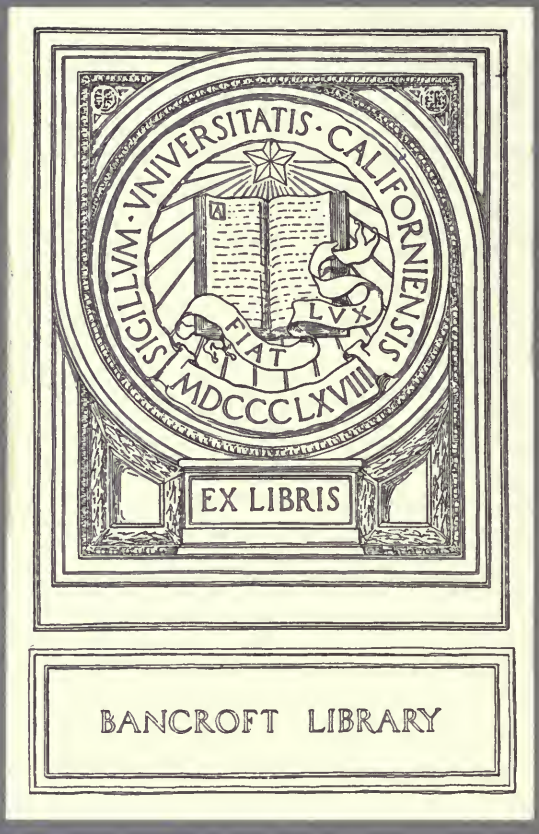
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Bancroft Library

THE BANCROFT LIBRARY.

By J. J Peatfield

All nations, during their slow march along the highway leading to civilization, from the earliest known period of mankind's gradual emergence out of the sluggish conditions of savage and pastoral life into those of settled communities, have shown deep interest in recording past events. The pictograph and hieroglyphic still remain in evidence thereof. As soon as communities began to establish themselves in cities, —no matter how small—their primitive annals—no matter in how crude a form they were recorded—were guarded with scrupulous care, and every effort was made to insure their preservation. In these small beginnings the evolution of libraries had its genesis.

It is known that farther back than 2000 B. C., libraries existed in ancient Chaldea and Egypt, the most famous of those of the land of the Nile being the "Library of Osymandyas," the existence of which in the palace temple near Thebes, popularly known as the "Memnonium" is proven by the discovery of Champollion of sculptured inscriptions in one of the inner rooms. The inscriptions are: "Theoth, the inventor of letters, President of the Hall of Books," and "The Goddess Saf, his companion, Lady of Letters." These sculptured records are ascribed to the 14th century, B. C.

Next in order of time follow the Assyrian and Babylonian libraries. In the ruins of Nineveh and Babylon, Layard and Botta discovered collections of bricks, tiles and cylinders of clay, inscribed in cuneiform characters, and the study of them has revealed the fact that, not only were the national records kept in this manner, but that to a large class of such tablets the

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term "Public Library in Clay" is applicable. There is every reason to believe that this last mentioned collection was made about 650 B. C., by command of Sardanapalus V., for the purposes of public instruction.

Passing from Persia into Greece, and only referring to the unreliable statement made that Pisistratus founded a library at Athens, 537–527 B. C., and opened it to the public, we find that, according to Strabo, Aristotle was the first to form a library in that country. After the philosopher's death his collection was conveyed to Scepsis, in Troas, where it fell into disorder, a portion of it being concealed in a cave in order to secure the works from the unscrupulous mode of collecting books practised by the kings of Pergamus. This is worthy of notice, as showing the eagerness with which books were sought for in those early days, and the high appreciation in which they were held

We now come to the noble library of Alexandria, the literary glory of Egypt. Founded by Ptolemy Soter about 300 B.C., it was constantly enlarged by his successors down to the time of its unintentional destruction, 48 B. C., by the action of Julius Caesar, who, having espoused the cause of Cleopatra, found himself compelled to burn the ships in the harbor of Alexandria. The methods sometimes adopted to obtain valuable additions to the Alexandrian library, were not more strictly honorable than those employed by the kings of Pergamus. It is narrated that Ptolemy Euergetes, during a time of famine in Athens, granted permission to the Athenians to buy Egyptian wheat for the relief of the city, on the condition that the original writings of Æschylus, Sophocles and Euripides should be sent to him, he remitting fifteen talents, about $14,000, as a guaranty for the safety of the works. At Alexandria they were carefully copied, and the copies, not the originals, were returned to the Athenians, who, however, were allowed to keep the money. This narrative is interesting in as much as it bears testimony to the high value attached to original manuscripts.

Contemporaneous with this first library of Alexandria, was the growth of a similar institution under the vigorous modes of procedure of the kings of Pergamus. Probably founded by Attalus I., 244 B. C., it was so enlarged by his successors as to become a rival of that of the Ptolemies, the loss of which it was destined to replace. For Anthony, after his successful war in the East, sent it as a gift to Cleopatra. The collection was deposited in the library called the Serapium—from its position in the temple of the Serapis—which was outrageously destroyed at the instigation of the fanatic, Theophilus, archbishop of Alexandria, A.D. 389.

Few cities in the world have shown a greater devotion to learning than Alexandria, and again she raised her head as the metropolis of culture. Another magnificent library was formed, doomed also to meet with destruction at the hands of fanaticism and barbaric iconoclasm. On the surrender of Alexandria to the victorious Mahommedans, Amrou would have bestowed the library on one Philoponus, but Caliph Omar's decision on the matter was that if the contents of the works agreed with the Koran the volumes were useless and need not be preserved; if they disagreed, the writings were pernicious and ought to be destroyed. For six months the furnaces of the four great baths of the city were fed by the precious volumes for fuel. After her subjection to Mussulman rule, the glory of Alexandria, as a center of learning, departed.

The prototypes of our modern bibliophiles and bibliomaniacs came into existence in the latter days of the Roman republic. Theretofore Rome had been too

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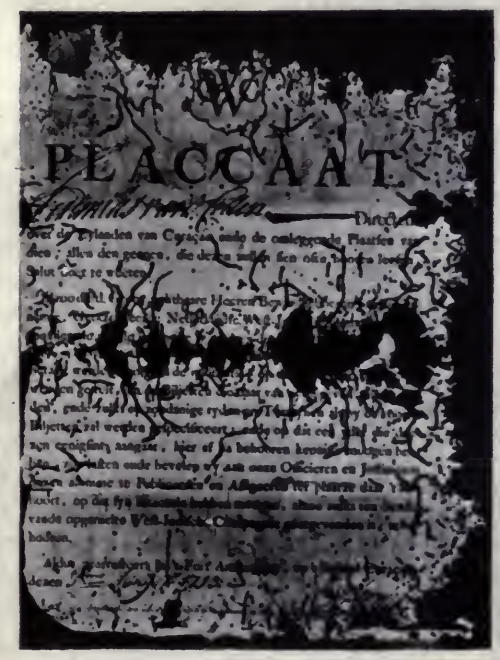
occupied in conquest to give much attention to literature. After her victorious arms had brought her in contact with the more civilized world, she imbibed the love of literature, science and art. Then libraries became a fashion, and no private house of any pretension was without its *Bibliotheca*, whether the owner were a Cicero or an unlettered upstart whose splendid bookshelves were never referred to by him. So great was the mania that one or more copyists, called *Librarii* (bookmen) were constantly employed in each house transcribing works. Bibliopoles became numerous and employed great numbers of such copyists, who were educated citizens of conquered countries, reduced to the condition of slavery. The vast accumulation of learning stored up in ancient Rome crumbled away beneath the withering effect of barbaric devastation, and we are indebted to the monastic orders for the preservation of only a fractional part of it.



A DUTCH PLACCAAT OR ORDER.*

With this brief historical account of the growth of ancient libraries, by way of calling attention to the great importance attached by the ancients to the acquisition of accumulative knowledge, we proceed to describe the gradual growth of the largest collection of material ever made for the study of a single historical field—The Bancroft Library.

The work of bringing together this great collection has extended over a period of more than thirty-five years of an industrious life. In 1859 Mr. Bancroft began to gather together such books as he had at hand bearing on California. The result was the filling of a few segregated shelves in his bookstore with about seventy or seventy-five volumes; small matter, indeed, but this initiatory step was the origin of his present library, which consists of 60,000 books, maps, manuscripts, etc., relating to Northwestern America from Panama to Alaska. From that time Mr. Bancroft became an enthusiastic collector.

Hubert Spencer says: "Very generally when a man begins to accumulate books he ceases to make any use of them." This may be true in the case of most bibliophiles, assuredly so of all bibliomaniacs, but the remark is unapplicable to Mr. Bancroft as a collector. He had a purpose in view; not the gratification of the morbid desire to possess rare books, which infects the mind of the unregenerate bibliomaniac. He was hardly the man to be satisfied with objectless effort of any kind; he loved books, and he saw here an opportunity to render his country an inestimable service in a line wholly neglected by others. Although he pursued with ardor the work of collecting, he never lost sight of his purpose. Vague and undefined as were at first his intentions of writing a work for publication, the con-

*This order was issued as a notice to the citizens of the Dutch West Indies Company Colony on the island of Curaçao by Jeremias van Collen, Directeur, on the 1st of January, 1713. White ants have fed upon this parchment and destroyed much of its value.

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FROM AN OLD COSMOGRAPHY.

ception of a Pacific States history was nevertheless latent in his brain.

Mr. Bancroft began to frequent second-hand bookstores, to ransack the rubbish on sidewalk stands, and buy any old pamphlet or scrap of material bearing on his subject. Then he extended his field, and going East, drew upon New York, Boston and Philadelphia for contributions to his collection. In 1862 he visited London and Paris, and there his eyes began to be opened as to the magnitude of his undertaking. At that time he had about 1000 volumes. On this his first visit to Europe he could do little more than glance over the enormous stocks of second-hand books stored in the hundreds of establishments he there found; but he determined at a latter date to search all Europe for the material he required. An opportunity presented itself in 1866. Meantime the library had increased in number of volumes which now amounted to 5,000, and then Mr. Bancroft recognized that he had only begun his collection.

On his second visit to London, he spent three months in looking over the ground and organizing a thorough system of search, appointing agents, employing intelligent men, and adopting all suitable measures for the promotion of his enterprise. Then Paris was visited, bookstalls and antiquarian warehouses were carefully searched, and catalogues examined. Madrid was his next objective point, and there he met with disappointment. As his collection increased, so did his original ideas on the subject expand. He found the history of the Pacific States so interwoven with that of Mexico that it was impossible for him to draw a line of separation, and his first purpose was developed into the aspiration to produce a history of all Northwestern America. Naturally he expected to find in Madrid much good material relating to Mexico, but he secured comparatively little. In turn all the principal cities of Europe were visited, and everywhere Mr. Bancroft found something to his purpose, ranging from pamphlets at a franc a piece to rare books or manuscripts at three, five or eight hundred dollars each. On his return to California he was the possessor of over 10,000 volumes, and thought that his task was done.

At the close of 1868, however, he received from his agent in London, a catalogue of 7,000 books and manuscripts on Mexico to be sold at auction in January following, in Leipsic, a glance at which sufficed to inform Mr. Bancroft that new ground had been thrown open to him. He did not hesitate. His agent was instructed by telegram to attend the sale and make purchases at his discretion. By this promptitude to act some 3,000 of the rarest and most valuable works extant were added to the collection. It may be interesting to the reader to learn that the volumes thus secured formed a portion of the *Bibleoteca Imperial de Mejico*, which the unfortunate Maximilian founded during his brief rule in

INTERIOR, UPPER FLOOR, BANCROFT LIBRARY.

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that country. José Maríe Andrade, a Mexican collector of exceptional literary taste and judgment, had been accumulating, for forty years, rare books bearing on the history of Mexico, and when Maximilian began the formation of an imperial library, he turned to this enlightened collector, and enlisted his co-operation. An arrangement was made with Señor Andrade by which, in consideration of a certain sum of money to be paid for his books, his splendid collection should form the basis of the Imperial Library, and become the property of the government. Unfortunately for the project, Maximilian's career was short. Immediately after the emperor's death at Querétaro, Andrade, who had not been paid for the books, packed them in 200 cases, hurried them off on mule-back to Vera Cruz, and thence shipped them to Europe.

COSMOGRAPHIA 1545 *

In June of the same year another important addition to the collection was acquired at a sale in London. The catalogues described this lot as consisting of "an extraordinary collection of books relating to Mexico and North and South America, from the first introduction of printing in the New World, A. D. 1544 to A. D. 1868." At the auction Mr. Bancroft's agent secured a number of works which filled up gaps in the collection. These purchases raised the number of volumes to 16,000.

The zealous collector now decided to begin work as an author, and in 1874 he published the first volume of his *Native Races*. His literary labors, however, did not interfere with the continued accumulation of books. He had appointed agents in all the principal cities of Europe, besides London, who were instructed to purchase, when opportunity offered, such material as was lacking. These agents attended all notable sales which presented possibilities of obtaining additional matter for the library. The more important of those in Europe were held in London, Paris, Lisbon, Leipsic, Berlin, Amsterdam and Brussels. In America, sales in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Cincinnati and Mexico kept furnishing supplies. So far-reaching and comprehensive was Mr. Bancroft's system that neither bookshop, store nor auction sale escaped his notice; and thus for years a steady stream of material was flowing into his literary reservoir.

Mention must be made of two more collections, at least, from which very valuable additions were procured, namely, that of Mr. E. G. Squier, sold in New York in 1876, and that of Don José Fernando Ramivez, sold in London in 1880.

*Rare.

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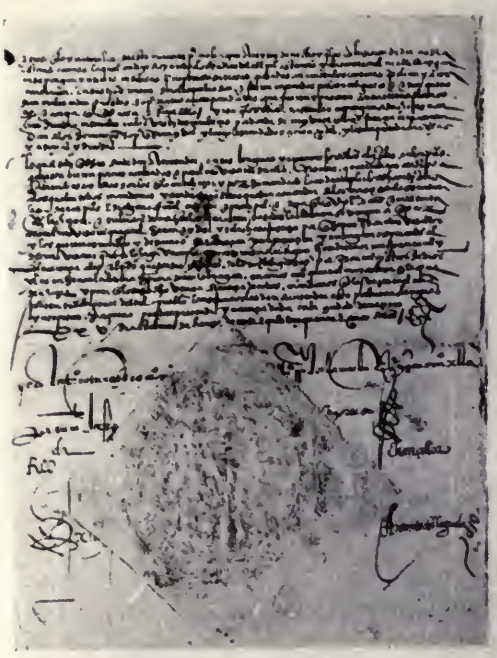
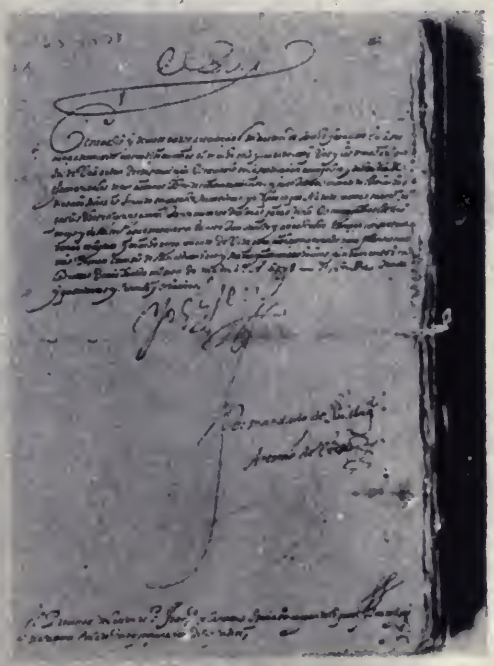


ROYAL CEDULA *[1]

Squier, a man of letters and a well-known author, availed himself of the opportunity which his position as United States Minister to Central America afforded him, and made a rich collection of manuscripts, maps, Central American newspapers, and political and historical pamphlets. A large part of the manuscripts was obtained from archives and depositors in Spain, but a considerable number of those relating to Central America were procured by himself in person while resident in the country. At the sale Mr. Bancroft bought whatever the collection contained that was not in his own library.

Ramivez had been president of Maximilian's first ministry. Highly educated, he was admitted to the bar early in life, and rose to eminence as State and federal judge. At one time head of the National Museum of Mexico, afterward minister of foreign affairs, an erudite scholar, and deeply interested in the history of his country, he was in every respect, as regarded culture, judgment, and opportunities offered by a high public position, capable of making a most valuable collection. And this he did. It comprised rare books and manuscripts on the Mexican Indian languages and dialects, and on the civil and ecclesiastical history of Mexico; tomes containing laws and ordinances relating to the Indies; unpublished manuscripts relating to the Jesuit missions; old sermons preached in Mexico, and a quantity of other matter. Many of these literary treasures were obtained from convents, after the suppression of the monastic orders. On the retirement of the French from Mexico, Señor Ramivez went to Europe, and took up his residence at Bonn, where he died in 1871.

It is impossible, in a short magazine article to furnish the reader with the names of even the more prominent authors of the



ROYAL CEDULA.*[2]

*[1] Bearing the signature of Isabella of Portugal—regent of Spain during her husband's absence in Italy, where he was crowned Emperor—dated 1529.

*[2] Bearing the signature of Charles V—dated 1541.

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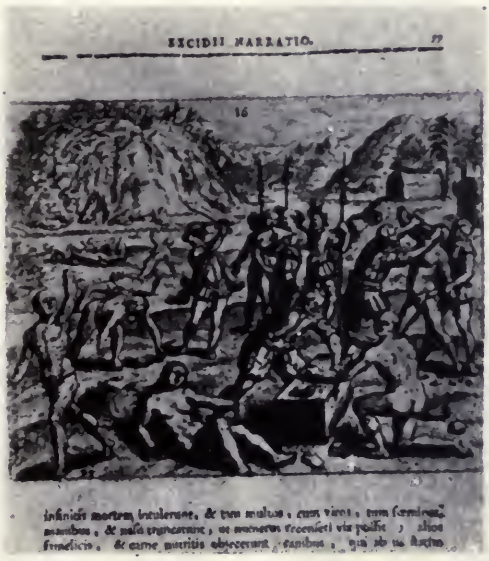
MANNER OF BINDING MISSION ACCOUNTS.*[1]

works and manuscripts collected—the list would be too long—suffice it to say that the library, which at the present date contains 60,000 units of the material described, includes every thing to be wished for, from the original cédulas of Charles V.; of his queen, Isabella of Portugal; of Philip II., bearing their respective autographs, "Yo el Rey" (I the King) and "Yo el Reyna" (I the Queen) down to a Mormon primer of 1868. Chronicles and histories; voyages and explorations; Aztec pictographs and ancient maps; cosmographies and atlases; quaint sermons and political pamphlets; papal bulls and letters of Columbus and the conquistadores Cortéz and Alvarado; newspapers and periodicals; rare pictures, wood cuts and engravings—little, indeed, bearing on the history of this part of the New World in all branches, ethnological, civil, political, ecclesiastical and social, has Mr. Bancroft failed to find and secure.



FROM LAS CASAS BOOK.*[2]

It would be supposed that the constant inflow to this vast accumulation would have satisfied any collector; and so it would any ordinary bibliophile; but Mr. Bancroft was working with no ordinary object, and his observant mind had, from the first, perceived that before him lay a hitherto untrodden field for literary exploration. Califor-

*[1]The separate books to form a volume were bound in green leather and then placed between wood sides covered with thinner leather.

*[2]Showing the savage cruelty of the Spanish Conqueror.

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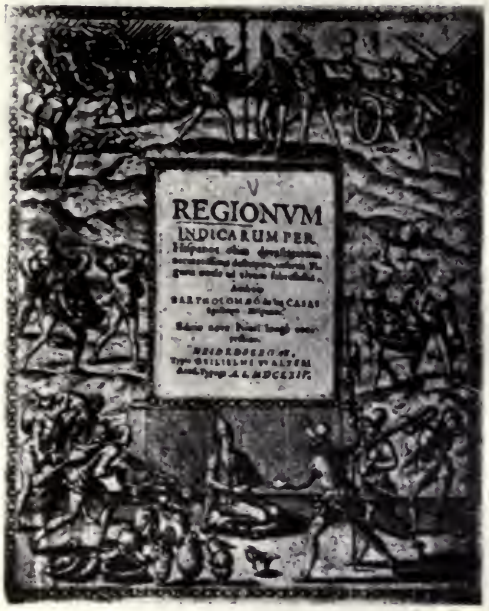
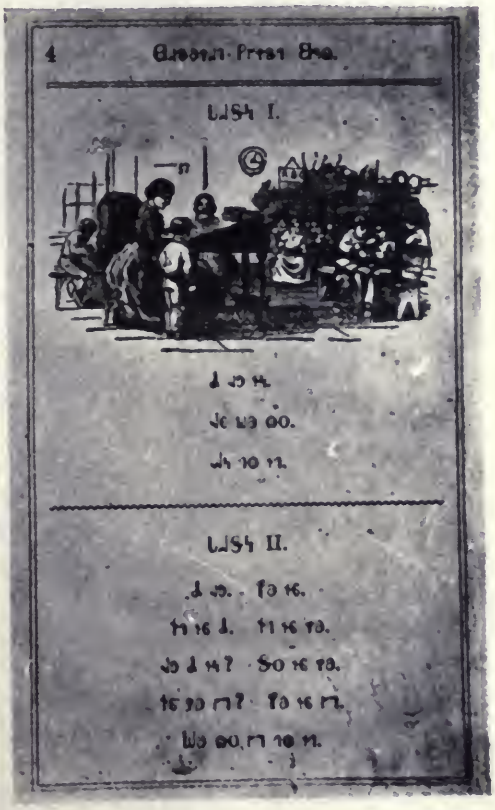


LAS CASAS' WORK ON THE RUIN OF THE INDIES.*

nia was a new land, and there were still living around him men of the pastoral age, when the only communication between it and the outside world was carried on by means of the trading ships that, from time to time, visited the coast; men advanced in years, whose memories went far back; men of high position and influence in the bygone days. There were, too, aliens from other lands, such as General Sutter, whom Mr. Bancroft visited, in 1876, at his residence in Litiz, Pennsylvania, obtaining from him a much-wished-for dictation of 200 pages in length; and Michael White and Widiver, who settled in Alta California, respectively in 1828 and 1832. The time could not be far distant when these would be with the departed. He would obtain their reminiscences. Besides this source, there were the records and libraries of the Missions and municipal and county archives, in keeping when California was under Spanish domination and Mexican rule. These should be searched; and Mr. Bancroft rushed into another undertaking entailing further great expenses.

He prosecuted the work with his customary thoroughness. Competent men were sent out to obtain memoirs from all whose information would be likely to prove valuable. Many of the reminiscences—and there were many of them—thus procured were autographic, but the majority was secured by means of dictation. The most important documents of this class were the contributions of General Vallejo and Governor Alvarado. The value of the papers and documents supplied by General Vallejo are beyond estimation. They were carefully arranged, indexed and bound, making no less than twenty-seven thick, quarto vol-



MORMON PRIMER 1868

*See pictorial title page, published in Heidelberg 1664.

Bancroft Library

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HUBERT HOWE BANCROFT.

umes. This priceless material was presented to Mr. Bancroft by the General, who had collected them with the purpose of writing a history of California himself. Nor did he therein cease to give practical expression to his admiration for Mr. Bancroft's undertaking; for two years he worked enthusiastically for the cause, alternately dictating history, and searching the country for fresh documentary and personal information. The additions thus made by him swelled the original number of his volumes to fifty. Second only in importance to General Vallejo's history, is that contributed by Governor Alvarado, which constitutes five large volumes of manuscript written from dictation.

While this work was being carried on among the old Californian families, other men were simultaneously engaged in examining county and municipal archives, from San Francisco to San Diego, and transcribing important matter. Moreover, all the Missions were visited, and their records, registers and account books, besides a mass of historical and statistical material written

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NOVA TYPIS TRANSACTA NAVIGATIO.*

by the priests were inspected, and copies taken of everything that could contribute to the production of a complete history. It was during this period (in 1874) that Mr. Bancroft acquired the valuable collection of Judge Benjamin Hayes, formerly district judge of Los Angeles. From the time of his arrival, in 1849, Judge Hayes had been a diligent collector of documents relating to the history of Southern California, and which he had hoped to use himself. The collection embraces copies from mission and municipal archives, a great quantity of clippings from books and early newspapers, all systematically arranged, and manuscript notes and accounts of his own travels in various parts of the southern country.

Such is a brief sketch of the growth of the Bancroft Library. But the outside work done in collecting was as nothing compared with that performed inside. Every single book, manuscript, newspaper and pamphlet was separately read and separately indexed as to to its contents. A selection of leading subject, about fifty in number, was made, such as architecture, art, bibliology, biography, botany, education, ethnology, and so on, and a separate note taken, after a particular form, of every statement or fact bearing upon each subject and its subdivisions, with title of book and page, and its shelf number. These notes were sorted, subject by subject, and filed in alphabetical order in appropriate receptacles, so that when information on any particular subject is required, be it mining or Indian childrens' playthings, all that is necessary is to go the labeled cases, take out a packet or a score of packets, and the searcher will have hundreds of references or a small half-dozen, according to the importance of the matter he wants.

Let the reader take into consideration the magnitude of such a work. To turn over every leaf, con it, and take notes. A regiment of assistants was required; for the method was not conceived and put in practice until the library had assumed large proportions. There are hundreds of thousands of these notes which will prove of inestimable value in future research.

To the utility and uniqueness of this library, it is almost needless to refer. It is exceptional, and has no rival in the world, nor has it ever had a predecessor as regards design. It stands alone. Never in the history of libraries has any collection ever been

*It is a history of the discovery of America written by a monk of the Convent of Suttenstock of Lower Austria, under the Latin nom de plume *Philoponus* (Lover of toil.)

This monk's writings narrate the adventures of the first missionary sent to the new world, Padre Buil or Buell, a Catalan Benedictine, who was sent in 1492 to preach to the Indians. Buil came in collision with Columbus, and on his return spared no means to injure him.

This work was published in 1621.

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made similar to it. It contains all the material that can ever be secured on the past history of a particular region occupying one-twelfth of the earth's surfac. No further additions to it can be made except the productions of the writers of the day; and never again will an opportunity occur for a like enterprise elsewhere. There is no new continent to discover, and never will another Columbus arise. No collection for a single historical study has been, or ever can be, made approaching it in dimensions, and the destruction of the library, or even the dispersion of its contents, would be irremediable, for it could never be reproduced. With regard to its priceless value to the Pacific States of our own country, it may be remarked that their individual histories can be written with a comprehensiveness and fullness of detail that can attach to that of no other State in the Union, or of no other country in the world. Posterity will proclaim this fact, and will not fail to appreciate, perhaps, more highly than is done at the present time, the value of the services rendered by Mr. Bancroft to American history and general knowledge.

J. J. Peatfield.

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